



Representation and Resistance

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

LGBTQ+ inclusive content for kids, including performances, books, curricula, and more, has come under ever-increasing attack, bolstered in recent months by the federal government—but people are speaking out and fighting back.

After President Trump fired the board of the Kennedy Center and named himself chair of its board, the organization cancelled a scheduled performance of the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C. and the National Symphony Orchestra. The show had been set to include John Bucchino's work "A Peacock Among Pigeons," a musical version of the 2015 picture book by Tyler Curry about a bird embracing his individuality and difference.

The Kennedy Center also can-

celled a tour of the children's musical "Finn," about a young shark similarly wanting to "sparkle and shine," unlike the gray sharks around him. The show was created by Chris Nee, Michael Kooman, and Christopher Dimond, who also worked together on the LGBTQ+ inclusive Netflix kids' show "Ridley Jones." The trio explained on social media that "Finn" had been commissioned by the Kennedy Center, and after early success, was chosen to be its next touring show. "At its heart it has a universal message of love and acceptance. The fact that that extends to sparkly boys seems to be controversial," they said.

They asserted, though, "We will not abandon the kids we wrote this

see **MONROE**, page 2



We don't need Trump's permission to celebrate us

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Frederick Douglass is dead. In 2017, President Donald J. Trump didn't appear to know this fact. However, in 2025, he may still not know.

In kicking off Black History Month in 2017, Trump hosted a "listening session" at the White House, leaving attendants scratching their heads wondering if he knew Douglass—a self-liberated former enslaved male turned abolitionist—died in 1895. Expecting then-White House press secretary Sean Spicer to clarify what Trump meant regarding his comment on Douglass, Spicer, however, made it clear he, too, didn't quite know if Douglass was dead.

"I think he [Trump] wants to high-

light the contributions he has made. And I think through a lot of the actions and statements he's going to make, I think that the contributions of Frederick Douglass will become more and more."

The remarks from both Trump and Spicer could have been an episode of "Drunk History," a TV comedy series where an inebriated narrator fumbles to recount historical events, which illustrates why we need Black History Month and an intensive tutorial for Trump and his administration then and now.

see **MONROE**, page 7

Transgender women near Rome pray for Pope Francis, celebrate his outreach

By Giovanna Dell'Orto
Associated Press

TORVAIANICA, Italy (AP) — Moira Camila Garnica and a group of fellow migrant transgender women have been gathering at their parish church to pray for Pope Francis as he continues to battle pneumonia in a Rome hospital, about an hour away from this modest seaside town.

Many grew up Catholic in Argentina like Francis, and their prayers encompass gratitude for his outreach — several met him in person — as well as hope that the door he opened toward a doubly marginalized commu-

see **POPE**, page 5



Moira Camila Garnica poses for a portrait outside the Beata Vergine Immacolata parish church in Torvaianica, Italy. (AP Photo by Bernat Armangué.)

Federal appeals court upholds school policy protecting LGBTQ+ student privacy

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

A federal appeals court has ruled that a public school does not violate parents' rights when school officials do not inform them that their child is grappling with the possibility or reality of being LGBTQ+.

The challenged school policy, in Ludlow, Massachusetts, directed

teachers and staff not to inform parents of a student's use of a different pronoun and name unless the student asked for staff's help in approaching their parents about the issue.

A Massachusetts couple argued that, by not informing them of the student's identity at school, the school was interfering with their fundamental right to parent their child.

A three-judge panel of the First Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Boston ruled that the policy did not deprive parents of their right to raise their child based on their values.

"Outside school, parents can obtain information about their children's relationship to gender in many ways, including communicating with

see **STUDENT PRIVACY**, page 4

Supreme Court: Poised to ease burden on straights, scrutinize books in school

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

Long-time observers of the U.S. Supreme Court might have been wondering last Wednesday why the court would have spent its scarce

oral argument time on an issue on which all sides already agree.

The case was *Ames v. Ohio*, in which a long-time female employee of Ohio's Department of Youth Services said she was denied a promotion and then demoted because she

is straight. Her evidence was the fact that gay people got both of the jobs she wanted.

The legal issue February 26 was not whether someone at the De-

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"I am thrilled to accept the Razzie award in so many important categories for @megalopolisfilm, and for the distinctive honor of being nominated as the worst director, worst screenplay, and worst picture at a time when so few have the courage to go against the prevailing trends of contemporary moviemaking!"

- Francis Ford Coppola begins his Razzie acceptance speech via Instagram. Of course, one can rebound from a Razzie. Pamela Anderson was named Razzie Redeemer for "The Last Showgirl". In 1996, she was named Worst New Star for the eminently more entertaining "Barb Wire".

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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show for. They are already under attack from every side. We didn't ask for this joy bomb of a show to be a part of the resistance, but here we are." The trio have now paired with producers and husbands Seth Rudetsky and James Wesley Jackson to bring the show to The Town Hall performance space in New York City next month for a one-night, live-streamed performance with members of the original Kennedy Center cast and a number of Broadway stars. The Gay Men's Chorus of Washington D.C. will also perform, joined by members of the New York City Gay Men's Chorus. To top things off, the show will benefit The Trevor Project, which serves LGBTQ+ youth.

In Iowa, however, a Republican-led subcommittee is trying to stop queer performers by advancing a bill that would make it a felony for parents to bring minors to drag shows or for business owners to allow minors at such shows—where "drag show" is defined as any show where a performer "exhibits a gender identity that is different than the performer's gender assigned at birth." That would ban any trans person from performing as their authentic gender in any type of show, drag or otherwise, and make it difficult for families to attend Pride parades (not to mention making it impossible to stage several Shakespeare plays).

One Iowa Action, an LGBTQ+-rights group, is encouraging Iowa residents to contact the Iowa House Education Committee in opposition to the bill. Groups including the National Association of Social Workers, Des Moines Performing Arts, the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa, and the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa Action Fund have also expressed their opposition, reported Iowa newspaper the Decorah Leader.

In the educational realm, local and state bans on LGBTQ+-inclusive and other diverse books continue to propagate, with the recent executive orders against "gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology" adding fuel to the fire. Department of Defense-run schools for children of servicemembers, for example, have been told to remove classroom and library materials related to those topics, and to stop all cultural observances, activities, and clubs.

Military families at European Command

headquarters in Germany, however, booed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth during his visit in mid-February, and chanted "DEI," reported NBC News, which noted, "Protests by military families against a defense secretary are extremely rare." Additionally, 55 middle school students at the on-base Patch Middle School staged a walkout, reported Stars & Stripes. Subsequently, about 150 students walked out in protest at Nile C. Kinnick High School on Yokosuka Naval Base, as did 60 students at Kadena High School on Kadena Air Base in Okinawa.

PBS, which gets approximately 15% of its funding from the federal government, also recently removed a series of videos and associated teaching guides about LGBTQ+ identities and history from its PBS LearningMedia website, which is intended for educators. It confirmed to local news outlet Hell Gate that this was done in response to recent executive orders. These "Hidden Voices" videos were part of a partnership among PBS affiliate WNET, the New York City Council, and the New York City Department of Education. The latter has now stepped up to host the videos on a department website and make them available as a YouTube playlist.

It's not just LGBTQ+ identities that are being targeted, either. The "President's Own" United States Marine Band recently cancelled a collaboration with the Equity Arc Wind Symphony, a group of 30 high school performers chosen through audition by the Chicago-based nonprofit Equity Arc, which mentors young musicians of color. Equity Arc said on its Facebook page that the program was halted in response to the recent executive orders.

It added, however, that while the cancellation was out of its control, "what remains unchanged is our unwavering commitment to creating opportunities for musicians of color," stating, "We will continue to fight for spaces where your artistry is valued."

We must all likewise keep fighting for LGBTQ+ youth, youth of color, children of LGBTQ+ parents, and all young people who deserve to see themselves and their world authentically reflected in their schools, media, and entertainment.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog for LGBTQ+ parents plus a searchable database of 1,700+ LGBTQ+ family books.

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SCOTUS

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partment discriminated against 60-year-old Marlean Ames because she was straight. And the issue was not whether laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination prohibit discrimination against heterosexuals. They do.

The question was a narrow but important one: Could the court require that an employee who was a member of a majority group—in this case, straight people—to jump through an extra hoop when pressing a claim of discrimination that typically affects minorities. Some federal appeals circuits have said yes, some have said no.

The Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeal said yes, members of a majority group must meet an additional burden: “background circumstances.” It based its conclusion on earlier precedents in the Sixth Circuit, noting that “background circumstances” are evidence “to support the suspicion that the defendant is that unusual employer who discriminates against the majority.”

Ames, a long-time employee for the Ohio facility for young people convicted of felons, lost a promotion to one gay person, then had her old job given to another gay person. The supervisors who made those decisions were both straight.

The Sixth Circuit, ruling against Ames, said she failed to show any background circumstances or pattern of discrimination.

“Plaintiffs typically make that showing with evidence that a member of the relevant minority group (here, gay people) made the employment decision at issue, or with statistical evidence showing a pattern of discrimination by the employer against members of the majority group.”

Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination based on sex, and the Supreme Court, in *Bostock v. Clayton*, held that “sex” includes sexual orientation.

During arguments before the Supreme Court, Ames’ attorney, Xiao Wang, and the U.S. Solicitor General’s office, represented by Ashley Robertson, argued that Title VII applies equally to all plaintiffs, regardless of whether they are in the majority or a minority.

“The court of appeals applied a different and more difficult standard to

[Ames] because it considered her a member of the majority,” said Robertson. “But Title VII draws no distinctions between plaintiffs based on their race, religion, sex, or other protected characteristic. That alone is reason to vacate the decision below....”

Ohio Solicitor General Elliot Gaiser said, “Ohio agrees it is wrong to hold some litigants to a higher standard because of their protected characteristics.”

The rare agreement of both sides on such a crucial point prompted Justice Brett Kavanaugh to say, “So, all you want for this case is a really short opinion that says discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation—whether it’s because you’re gay or because you’re straight—is prohibited, and the rules are the same whichever way that goes?”

“That’s right,” said Wang.

Most legal observers writing about the oral

argument expressed confidence that the Supreme Court would rule for majority plaintiffs, like Ames, on this narrow question. But some said a ruling for Ames—and against requiring majority plaintiffs to satisfy an extra burden of proof—could lead to many more lawsuits claiming reverse discrimination.

In other Supreme Court news:

Books in the classroom: The high court has agreed to hear another LGBTQ+ related case this session: *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, about public schools requiring educational materials that acknowledge the existence of LGBTQ+ people. The case comes from Maryland and the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. The parents of three students filed a lawsuit against the Montgomery County Board of Education’s policy of including LGBTQ+ storybooks for elementary school children. The Board policy does not allow parents to opt-out their children from reading the materials and does not agree to alert parents when such books are being read. The parent plaintiffs said the policy violates their First Amendment rights to free exercise of religion, free speech, and due process. A three-judge panel of the Fourth Circuit voted 2 to 1 against the parents to deny the parents’ request for a preliminary injunction to stop use of the books. The panel majority said the parents failed to submit any evidence of how “simply hearing about other views... [can] necessarily exert pressure to believe or act differently than one’s religious faith requires.” The panel majority acknowledged that the parents might eventually be able to provide “sufficient evidence that an elementary-age child’s exposure to the Storybooks and related conversations amounts to coercion.” But at this preliminary stage, the Fourth Circuit, denied their request. In agreeing to hear the parents’ appeal, the Supreme Court says it will determine whether “public schools burden parents’ religious exercise when they compel elementary school children to participate in instruction on gender and sexuality against their parents’ religious convictions and without notice or opportunity to opt out?” Oral argument is set for April 22.

Fight over AIDS grants: Chief Justice John Roberts on February 26 granted a request from the U.S. State Department to stay a district court order that required the Trump administration pay out grants awarded to 10 groups, including AIDS organizations, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The Trump administration had ignored the lower court rulings to distribute the funding, as approved by Congress. The Supreme Court has not yet weighed in on whether to hear the Trump administration’s appeal concerning the funding.

Drag company appeal rejected: The Supreme Court declined February 21 to hear an appeal from a drag theatrical group in Memphis. The group filed a lawsuit, *Friends of George’s v. Shelby County*, to challenge the constitutionality of a Tennessee law banning drag shows performed where anyone under 18 might see them. The Sixth Circuit ruled only that the plaintiffs lacked standing to bring the legal challenge, said Abby Rubenfeld, a long-time LGBTQ+ legal activist in Nashville. The Supreme Court denied the *Friends* appeal on February 24.

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GUEST OPINION

NH Bill Would Strip Parents' Freedom to Make Healthcare Decisions for Their Transgender Child

Submitted by GLAD Law

Statement from GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) on HB 377

Today New Hampshire's House Health, Human Services & Elderly Affairs Committee heard testimony on HB 377, a bill to prohibit medical care for transgender adolescents.

GLAD Law Senior Staff Attorney Chris Erchull testified before the committee and issued this statement after the hearing:

"The bill that was heard by the Health, Human Services & Elderly Affairs Committee today is a clear example of extreme government overreach into the private lives of New Hampshire families. Parents and families, not the government, know what's best for their children. The committee heard from parents today about how their transgender children have flourished with the proper care. They also heard from transgender youth and adults about the benefits to their own lives that have come from receiving appropriate and necessary care. All New Hamp-

shire families should retain the ability to make healthcare decisions for themselves without government interference. HB 377 takes that right away from parents who want nothing more than to care for their child.

HB 377 is the latest in a years-long campaign by extremist legislators to roll back rights and protections for transgender Granite Staters, especially transgender youth, and to insert government between them and their families. This coordinated effort is baseless and cruel and contradicts New Hampshire's bedrock values of freedom and fairness.

The best way to protect the health and well-being of transgender young people is to ensure that they can continue to access essential, age-appropriate medical care from licensed clinicians practicing according to the well-established standards of care. Banning necessary medical care puts young people at increased risk of serious harms, including depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts or behavior. When transgender youth, like all

youth, receive the medical care they need, they are able to thrive and have healthy, happy childhoods that set them up for success in life. It can be hard to understand what it's like to have a transgender child. The parents of transgender adolescents need information and advice from professionals they trust, but this bill would cut off access to that guidance, leaving families without hope for supporting their children as they suffer. The committee must vote inexpedient to legislate to protect all New Hampshire families' ability to seek and obtain health care in consultation with their trusted providers."

GLAD Law (GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders) has been a leading force in LG-BTQ+ rights for nearly 50 years. With deep roots in New England and impact nationwide, we use strategic litigation, legislation, and public education to fight discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and HIV status. GLAD Law's bold strategy and precedent-setting victories have reshaped the legal landscape, advancing equality for all people facing discrimination and social barriers. www.glad.org

Student Privacy

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their children and making meaningful observations of the universe of circumstances that influence their children's preferences, such as in clothing, extracurricular activities, movies, television, music, internet activity, and more," said the panel.

The decision comes in *Footte v. Ludlow*, one of several cases involving LGBTQ+ youth that have been percolating through the federal courts in the past year. The lawsuits, supported by the Alliance Defending Freedom and other right-wing groups, seek to curtail efforts by schools to respect the needs for safety, privacy, and resources of students who feel they may be LGBTQ+.

The opinion in the latest decision, issued February 18, goes out of its way to cite U.S. Supreme Court precedent supporting the protection of LGBTQ+ youth. The three-judge panel which delivered the First Circuit opinion was comprised of three female Democratic appointees: Lara Montcalvo, Julie Rikelman, and O'Rogerie Thompson.

The legal conflict originated with parents of an 11-year-old sixth grader in Ludlow, a small suburb of Springfield, Massachusetts. (The student and a sibling at the same middle school are identified only as B.F. and G.F. in court papers.)

The student B.F., who was identified as female on their birth certificate, began questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity in middle school. The student confided to a teacher that they were struggling with depression and other issues, including that they "might be" attracted to girls. The student approached the teacher for guidance in asking their parents for help. The teacher talked to the student's mother and shared the student's concerns. The parents wrote to the teacher and said

they would seek help for their child and asked that the teacher not have any further talks with the student.

"As per our understanding of Supreme Court precedent," wrote the appeals court in the unsigned opinion, "our pluralistic society assigns those curricular and administrative decisions to the expertise of school officials, charged with the responsibility of educating children. And the [policy] of nondisclosure as to a student's at-school gender expression without the student's consent does not restrict parental rights in a way courts have recognized as a violation of the guarantees of substantive due process."

After talking to their teacher, B.F. sent an email to all their teachers, school counselor, and superintendent, identifying as "gender-queer." The email indicated the student had decided to use both male and female pronouns and would—in school—go by a different name. The school counselor then sent an email to staff, directing them to refer to the student by their preferred name and pronouns at school but to use their given name and female pronouns when communicating with the student's parents. A teacher informed the parents that the student was continuing to use the different name and gender identity at school and that teachers were respecting the student's choice.

The policy adopted by the Ludlow School Committee is like those in most schools concerning a student being pregnant. It also reflects a Massachusetts state policy implemented in 2012 that advised school staff to accept a student's asserted gender. The state policy also noted that "[s]ome transgender and gender nonconforming students are not openly so at home for reasons such as safety concerns or lack of acceptance." The policy advised school staff to obtain permission from a student before discussing gender identity issues with the student's parents.

B.F.'s parents considered the teachers' com-

pliance with the policy as a form of "treatment" for gender dysphoria. Their lawsuit said the school's actions had deprived them of their rights to family privacy under the Constitution and their right to determine their child's education and medical treatment. A district court ruled for the school, and the parents appealed to the First Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals.

The First Circuit upheld the district court ruling, saying the school's actions did not constitute medical treatment. It said that, while parents have a right to educate their children, parents do not have a right to direct how schools will teach their children. And the circuit panel said the school's conduct is "rationally related to a legitimate state interest"—that is, "cultivating a safe, inclusive, and educationally conducive environment for students, which allows students to thrive and thus learn."

"State actors have a compelling interest in protecting the physical and psychological well-being of minors," wrote the panel decision, quoting a 1989 Supreme Court decision regarding youth access to dial-a-porn. (*Sable Communications of California v. FCC* held efforts to protect youth from indecent messages cannot infringe on the right of adults to access such messages.)

"That interest [in protecting minors] is at its apex," wrote the panel, "when a school board seeks to protect children who are particularly vulnerable, such as transgender minors."

"The [Ludlow school policy] plausibly creates a space for students to express their identity without worrying about parental backlash," stated the First Circuit panel. "By cultivating an environment where students may feel safe in expressing their gender identity, the [policy] endeavors to remove psychological barriers for transgender students and equalizes educational opportunities."

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Pope

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nity will not be shut in the future.

"The biggest fear is that you never know how things will be in the future, should he no longer lead the church, that it might go backwards," said Garnica, 47. "We hope that the church will continue with this empathy, continue to be open to everyone, continue to help, because sometimes one person can take a big step forward and then others take three steps back."

Garnica and several other Latin American women, most sex workers who have been in Italy for a couple of decades, gathered for evening Mass in late February at the Blessed Immaculate Virgin Church. It was here they found food, medicine and basic financial assistance when Italy's strict COVID-19 lockdown rendered them unable to work, isolated and destitute.

The parish priest, the Rev. Andrea Conocchia, invited them to write letters to Francis outlining their needs. The Vatican's almoner office not only provided money but brought a few dozen of them to the Vatican for vaccines. Years later, some were invited to a lunch for the poor with the pope.

"In this Covid period, it was important that Pope Francis got inside the mind of transgender women, in the mind of the human beings that we are, and started to treat us like human beings,

and that I think is the moment when faith or Christianity could embrace us," said Carla Segovia.

The 48-year-old woman, of Indigenous Bolivian descent, left her native Argentina as a college student during its financial crisis more than 20 years ago. She has been working as a prostitute since she started to pay for her gender surgeries as a youth, and calls the violence and discrimination she has faced a tough test of "your potential to survive."

Now that Francis is ill, she said she wants to "transmit to him our strength, the same thing that he brought to us in the difficult time of the pandemic. We want to inoculate him with this strength that is so crucial – the fact that you need to fight for your life."

Gender transition is a controversial issue in many countries including the United States, where Catholic bishops reject it, and immigration is also roiling politics on both sides of the Atlantic. But Francis has made inclusion a hallmark of his papacy; specifically, the Vatican has stated it's permissible, under certain circumstances, for trans people to be baptized as Catholics and serve as godparents.

Segovia and other women in their community were involved in the church as children but later felt their identity and work pushed them away – until they came to the Torvaianica parish's food distribution site, during the pandemic lockdown.

"We Latin Americans are very Catholic, but being trans, many doors close, and people walk away from us, and we walk away too," Garnica said. "The word-of-mouth was that this church welcomed you, helped you, and I came to ask for help because I felt so alone."

So did Minerva, a Peruvian 54-year-old who asked only her professional name be used, her voice shaking with emotion as she recounted how the experience changed her life in town.

"We had no work, we had no money to buy food. A friend through word of mouth told me, go to the parish and knock, ask for Father Andrea. I came, I knocked, and like never before he opened his arms, he provided a support so big that still today he's helping us," Minerva said.

"He opened for us so many doors. At the beginning even here people didn't pay attention to us. Now, when they see us, they greet us."

For the Rev. Conocchia, helping this group of women is perfectly in line with the model of an open church reaching out to the margins that Francis has promoted, as well as the pope's famous "who am I to judge" approach to LG-BTQ+ issues.

"We put the poor back at the center, we put people back at the center, and that's the Gospel," Conocchia said. "What matters to me is a person, a person's life and their story ... a person is never what they do."

He said the Vatican's more open attitude, as well as its concrete welcome for this group of

women, can help abolish prejudices that religious people hold – since it's possible the women's clients might include people who attend Mass, he wryly noted.

For the women, who often are rejected by their own families, it's a moment of grace that went straight to the heart.

"A trans girl would have never imagined in her life that she could see the pope receive her, welcome her, and help her," Garnica said. "Already here people mistreat you for being Latin American, imagine Latin America and trans. ... But thanks to Father Andrea, people understood that we also have a heart, we also can contribute, we need the church, too."

Minerva was a First Communion catechist in her parish in Peru, until she said she was kicked out for her identity. In the Torvaianica sacristy, under a picture of Francis, she practiced singing a Spanish-language version of "Amazing Grace" in hopes of joining the local choir. One verse, that she likes to sing to Mary, is about coming out of the shadows and into the light.

"I am church – not part of the church, I am church because each one of us is church," she said.

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The big story of last week was the death of **Gene Hackman** and his wife **Betsy Arakawa**...and their dog. Everybody seems to forget about the dog, as if it died in any less curious a way. Gene and his wife lived in a gated community in Santa Fe. What we know as of this writing is that maintenance workers called 911 saying that while gardening, they looked in the window and could see two unconscious people who appeared to be "decomposing" (that's one helluva vantage point). Police let themselves in through an unsecured front door. Fun fact—the Santa Fe Sheriff's office also investigated the set of "Rust," and we know what a crackerjack job they did on that! Police found Hackman in the "mud room" (note to readers not familiar with this term—typically a room between the back door and the kitchen where one would remove muddy footwear and clothing). They found Betsy on the floor of the bathroom surrounded by pills, with a (living) dog lying by her side. Another dog was found dead in a crate inside the bathroom closet. And a third dog was running around outside. And the police didn't find anything suspicious?

Then Gene's daughter Leslie chimed in. "Despite his age, he was in very good physical condition. He liked to do Pilates and yoga, and he was continuing to do that several times a week. So he was in good health." She later added that his death was "not terribly shocking because he was 95." OK, Leslie, but at the same time as his wife? And the dog? Turns out, Leslie hadn't talked to Dad for "several months". Good kid. Police say there's no sign of carbon monoxide poisoning. When they ran a test on Hackman's pacemaker, they discovered the last activity was on February 17th. So that's a couple weeks earlier. Both husband and wife's bodies have been downgraded from "signs of decomposition" to "mummification"—like they were found in Luxor near King Tut! And the most pressing question of all—would the Academy credit the "In Memoriam" package to include Hackman?

By now, we all know the answer to that—yes. I guess he got **Mitzi Gaynor's** slot. Still, there were moments of suspense. **Kamala** was coming, she wasn't coming. Then there was the "James Bond" sequence, a tribute that left the world asking the question, "Why?" I know they had **Dame Shirley** a few years ago. But don't tell me **Adele** was busy. Or **Gladys**. I'd have killed for a **Sheena**! I'm no theologian, but I'm fairly confident anyone named **Culkin** winning an Oscar is one of the signs of an imminent apocalypse. Am I the only one who thinks **Demi** could have been in "Nosferatu"? The only thing **Goldie** didn't do was scream "La La Land!" Lastly, I think **Sean Baker** was the best part of the show.

Moving onto another double death, let's talk about those poor, misunderstood **Menendez boys**. When we last spoke, the outgoing LA District Attorney was leaning towards resentencing the brothers, or at the very least, giving them a new trial. The new DA is inclined to let things stand as they are. He'll make his wishes known at the resentencing hearing scheduled for March 20-21. Just when things looked bleak...a new twist. **Gov. Gavin Newsom** (who cannot run for re-election) has ordered a "risk assessment" on the brothers. This is typically done when a governor is considering clemency. Newsom said, "My office conducts dozens and dozens of these clemency reviews on a consistent basis. But this process simply provides more transparency, which I think is important in this case, as well as provides us more due diligence before I make any determination for clemency." The report is due in 90 days—which means after the ruling from the resentencing hearing. So it ain't over until Newsom says it's over.

Remember when I predicted **Betty Gilpin's** run in "Oh, Mary!" would be disastrous at the box office? I'm not saying this is disastrous, but the show you couldn't get a ticket to is currently running at about 86% capacity. Sure, that's still commendable, but it's a precipitous drop. With **Titus Burgess** coming in for three weeks starting on March 18th, things should pick up a bit. And then? **Cole Escola** and the entire original cast return on April 8th—which is a perfect time to remind Tony Award voters why this was such a hit in the first place.

By the by, Cole's absence wasn't the only one to adversely affect the Broadway box office. **Audra McDonald** was out for five

performances of "Gypsy" due to a death of husband **Will Swenson's** father. Predictably, the box office suffered with attendance dropping from 85% to 58%. Ouch! That was a loss of roughly \$600K in revenue. Someone better remember that when it's time to renegotiate!

I want to give credit where it's due. When Audra was out of "Gypsy", her standby **Tryphena Wade** went on, and had a great success of her own. A spy sent us a video of her "Rose's Turn". She makes it her own—helped, in no small part, by eliminating the awkward key transposition put in for Audra. You can check her out on our website.

The return of the original cast of "Oh, Mary!" will obviously include **Conrad Ricamora**, who will once again slip into Abraham Lincoln's britches (which I suspect they'd both enjoy immensely). But before that, Connie and his hubby **Pete Wesley** dashed off to Gay Paree—which was gayer than ever, if their Instagram photos are to be believed. Snaps from their sojourn by the Seine can be found on social media...or on BillyMasters.com.

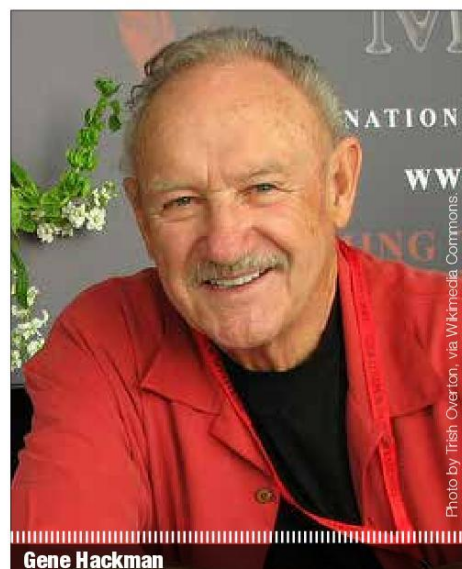
I recently told you about the cancellation of the national tour of "Finn", a children's musical which began at The Kennedy Center. There will be a special performance of the show on March 17th at New York's Town Hall. Obviously original cast members will be performing alongside numerous luminaries, such as **Andrea Martin**, **Andrew Rannells**, **Kelli O'Hara**, **Jessie Mueller**, **Lea Salonga**, and even the **New York City Gay Men's Chorus**—a group which was also banished from The Kennedy Center. Not surprisingly, this evening has been spearheaded by **Seth Rudetsky** and **James Wesley Jackson** along with "Finn" creators **Chris Nee**, **Michael Kooman** and **Christopher Dimond**. If you can't make it in person, have no fear—the night will also be livestreamed as part of the fifth anniversary celebration of "Stars in the House". Obviously proceeds must be going to a good cause, right? The beneficiary will be The Trevor Project. You can watch and donate at StarsInTheHouse.com.

I missed the Carnegie Hall debut of **Jinkx Monsoon**, which took place on Valentine's Day—a holiday I'm somewhat unfamiliar with...perhaps because it happens hot on the heels of my birthday. Fun fact—I've had many, many beaus on my birthdays. I've also had many, many beaus on Valentine's Day. But I've not had the same beau on both. While you ponder that, let me tell you Jinkx at Carnegie Hall was a triumph. I guess she practiced!

Our "Ask Billy" question is quite fascinating to me. Shawn in Dallas writes: "Do you know **Chad Franke**? His mom Ruby was arrested for child abuse. But he sure is pretty."

This is like one of those stories **Keith Morrison** would have narrated: "**Ruby Franke** had it all. Six kids, a husband, and a parenting podcast on YouTube. Life was good for Ruby—or was it?" While not germane to the story, Ruby and her family were members of the Mormon church and lived in Utah. All seemed fine until an August night in 2023, when her 12-year-old son Russell escaped through a window in their home and asked a neighbor to take him to the police. He had open wounds and duct tape and rope around parts of his body! Police also found 9-year-old Eva in "a similar physical condition of malnourishment." And then there's Chad. He seemed fine—probably because he'd moved out of the house before these events transpired. He became a sun-kissed blond lifeguard...nothing wrong with that. Now he's 20, working in real estate, and still posting online...on SnapChat. No indication that he's gay, but he doesn't seem averse to showing some skin, as you'll see on BillyMasters.com.

When Hackman's dog was in the closet and Chad isn't, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Looking at photos of Chad, I couldn't help but think he's exactly the kinda guy who would have been asked to model for A&F by their former CEO. Of course, that's why that CEO might end up in prison...alongside Chad's mom! It certainly ain't a crime to check Chad out on www.BillyMasters.com—the site that encourages you to take a little time to enjoy the view. If you have a question for me, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Demi is cast as Lyle Menendez! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



Gene Hackman

Photo by Trish Overton, via Wikimedia Commons.



Jinkx Monsoon

Photo by Mette Ostrowski.



Chad Franke

Photo via chadfranke, Instagram.

Monroe

Continued from page 1

Post-racial myth

With the election of Barack Obama as president, queries arose concerning the future need for Black History Month. Some Millennials, in particular, whose ballots helped elect the country's first African-American president, revealed that celebrating Black History Month seemed outdated. To them, the continuation of Black History Month was a relic tethered to an old defunct paradigm of the 1960s Black Civil Rights era and hindered the country's progress.

So, too, did Republican Senator Mitch McConnell agreed in 2009. McConnell gave his reasons: the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, the 1965 Voting Rights Act enfranchised Black Americans, and the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president.

Obama's candidacy was thought to have eradicated America's Original Sin and marshaled in America's dream of a "post-racial" era where race had finally become a "non-issue." In trying to prove how "post-racial" Obama was as a presidential candidate, Michael Crowley of "The New Republic" wrote in his 2008 article "Post-racial" that it wasn't only liberals who had no problem with Obama's race but conservatives who had no problem also, even the infamous ex-Klansman David Duke. "Even white Supremacists don't hate Obama," Crowley writes about Duke. "[Duke] seems almost nonchalant about Obama, don't see much difference in Barack Obama than Hillary Clinton--or, for that matter, John McCain."

Obama's election encapsulated for some whites the physical and symbolic representation of Martin Luther King's vision uttered in his historic "I Have a Dream" during the 1963 March on Washington. However, from the March, Black Americans saw the deliberate racist political misuse of MLK's quote, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content

of their character." The quote has been used to discredit all race-based remedies for historical injustice: Affirmative Action (In 2003, the SCOTUS allowed the Bakke case on "reverse discrimination" to stand. In 2023, SCOTUS ended affirmative action in college admissions in the "Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College."), reparations, Critical Race Theory, African American History, and now DEI. Trump 2.0 canceling of Black History Month comes as no surprise. He canceled all so-called "identity months."

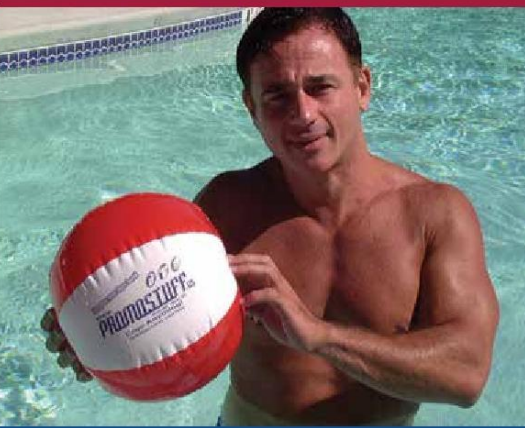
For years, the celebration of Black History Month, especially among white conservatives, has always brought up their ire around "identity politics" and "special rights." Republican Senator John McCain argued that "special rights" were why he didn't vote for the MLK Holiday or acknowledge it until, of course, he ran against Obama for the presidency in 2008.

Identity politics and "special rights," however, have always benefitted white Americans and perhaps people of color in Trump's camp. In Trump's first presidency, he removed white supremacist groups- Ku Klux Klan, Identitarians, Identity Christianity, Neo-Nazis, and Neo-Confederates, to name a few—from the Countering Violent Extremism program to profile Muslims. In this presidency, Trump gave all the January 6th insurrectionists a get-out-of-jail pardon. Trump's action has emboldened his followers more than ever to not only contest the celebration of Black History Month but to insist on a white history month. The pushback against Black History Month is decades old.

Still, we rise

During Black History Month, we gathered to celebrate us. With 250 years of slavery followed by 90 years of Jim Crow and then 60 years of "separate but equal" discriminatory practices, we still rise. Our history is a canon for survival and an archive for future generations to pass along because our lived experiences are sacred texts. It's Trump's hubris to assume we need his permission to celebrate.

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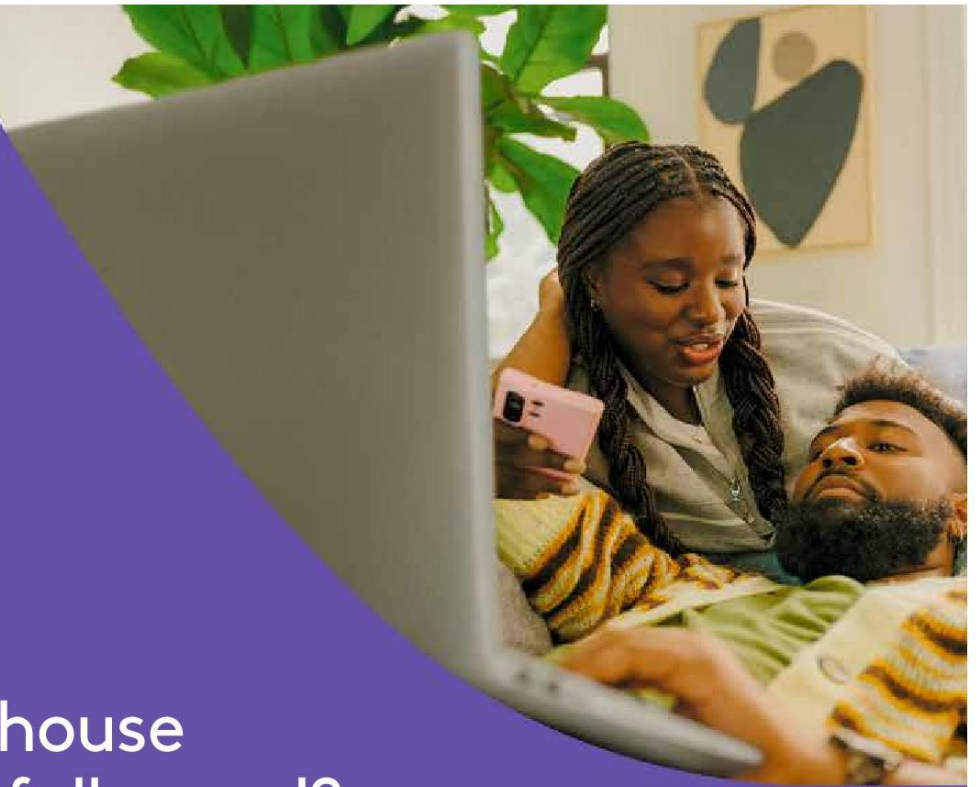
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